

Expanding opportunities for the poor in Brazil¹

Simon Schwartzman

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Social policies in Brazil: poverty, inequality and opportunity.

Brazil is known for its very high levels of social and income inequality, which have been reduced to some extent in the last decades, thanks to economic growth and different policies of income distribution and the expanding provision of social services such as education, health care, housing, and others. The United Nations Development Programme, in partnership with Brazilian Institutions, estimated the Index of Human Development for Brazilian municipalities (IDHM), and found that most municipalities improved very significantly their condition in the 1991-2010 period, going from the “low” to the “high” category on income, longevity and education (Figure 1). Since the mid 1990s, successive governments implemented several policies to deal with issues of poverty, education and unemployment and to create more opportunities for the poor. The positive impacts of many of these policies are undeniable, but, at the same time, there has always been the question about the extent to which these changes were a consequence of these policies or just an effect of broader processes of social change

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and economic development. As the country enters a period of economic recession, the question now is to what extent the effect of these policies would persist.

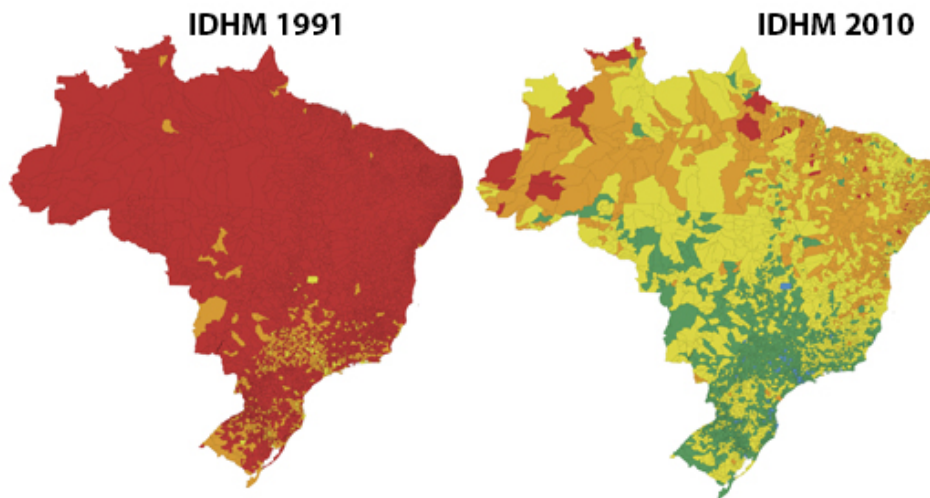


Figure 1. Evolution of IDMH between 1991 and 2010: most municipalities moved out of the situation of low development, in red. Source: (PNUD 2013)

The emphasis placed on the need to reduce poverty and income inequality are clearly justified by the existing conditions; to have a lasting impact, however, these policies would need not only to distribute benefits, but also to create better opportunities for persons to improve their ability to engage productively in the economy and to participate more actively as full citizens in society, overcoming the limitations of their socioeconomic origins and less dependent on government entitlements and subsidies. Ideally, a fully autonomous person should live in a modern world organized according to the principles of individual achievement and free choice, being capable to decide in what to believe, where to live, what to study, what to do for a living, with whom to marry or not, how many children to have; in contrast to a person living in a traditional world bound by social ascription, in which one's life is fully determined by his cultural, family and socioeconomic origin.²

In practice, of course, nobody is fully free from the constraints derived from his origins, but societies can be very different regarding the extent to which their citizens can have and make use of the opportunities to decide their own life, depending on the existing institutions, prevailing cultural values and individual conditions, Traditional societies

² The achievement-ascription dichotomy is one of the “pattern variables” developed by Talcott Parsons, a core concept in the sociological theories of modernization, drawing from the classic sociological polarities of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* and *Solidarité mécanique et solidarité organique* (Durkheim 1967, Parsons 1991, Tönnies 1912).

tend to be structured along social, economic and ethnic cleavages and hierarchies, and each person is expected to accept without question the place, life style and ways of thinking of their parents. In modern societies, all individuals, in principle, have the same rights and opportunities and are free to choose, but this formal equality can be strongly limited by the person's own values, living conditions and individual constraints. The transition from traditional to modern societies, when it takes place, is a consequence of changes in the value systems, with the rise of individualism; the breakdown or weakening of traditional institutions and power systems based on status and hierarchy; large-scale social and geographical mobility; and economic development, allowing the persons to be free from the need to work only for their daily survival. A central component of this transition is the expansion of public education, which should provide the individuals not only with the professional qualifications to participate in the job market, but also with the ability to understand the broader context on which they live, so that they can look for opportunities and decide about their destiny.

From this perspective, the provision of additional resources and access to services may be a necessary condition for expanding opportunities, but is not sufficient. Thus, regarding "bolsa familia", the conditional cash transfer programme that has been Brazil's flagship social policy since the late 1990s, the question is whether it was just able to "give the fish", improving the recipient's living conditions, or to teach them "how to fish" and to move out of poverty. Regarding the expansion of education, the question is whether it just gave more access to formal education to more sectors of society, or contributed to increase productivity and reduce the achievement and opportunity gaps among different sectors of society. Another feature of the social policies of the last several years has been the emphasis placed on social participation in policy implementation, from participatory budgeting to citizen's councils in education, health and other social programmes, and here again, the question is whether this kind of social empowerment helped to improve the quality and fairness of the social policies, and the participant's competencies as citizens. In this paper, we will revisit the main social policies put in place in Brazilian society in the last twenty years or so, asking, in which case, how much they actually led to expanded opportunities to the poor population.

Social mobility and changing opportunities.

The three main features of Brazilian society are its late development, high social mobility and high inequality. Brazil was the world's largest importer of African slaves³, with almost five million coming to work in sugar cane production, mining and coffee plantations, and the last to abolish slavery in 1888. In 1950, about 43% of the population 5 years and older were still illiterate, and universal access to primary education was only reached in the mid 1990s. Intense miscegenation precluded racial apartheid similar to the South African or southern United States, but social and economic inequality, strongly correlated with ethnic origins, remained very high.

Since the late 19th century, the country started to change, fuelled mostly by the wealth produced by coffee exports. Millions of immigrants came from Europe and Japan to the country's Southern regions, first as plantation workers and farmers, but later moving to the cities, and an incipient industry started to develop around Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. From the 1950s on, the country changed dramatically. Population increased very rapidly, from 70 million to 120 million between 1960 and 1980, reaching 180 million in 2010, thanks to high birth rates and increases in life expectancy, and moved from the countryside to urban centres in large numbers, with the proportion in the countryside going down from 60% to 6.5% in fifty years. The São Paulo region became the largest industrial hub in Latin America, attracting national and international investments and drawing the population for other regions of the country.

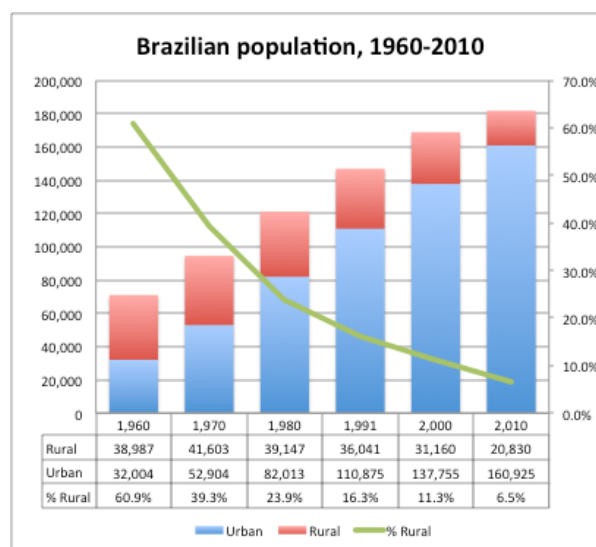


Figure 2. Source: Brazilian Censuses, 1960 - 2010

³ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces>

Urbanization was a spontaneous process, driven by the conditions of extreme poverty that affected those living in stagnant rural areas, particularly in the Northeast region, aggravated by periodical draughts that threatened them with starvation, and the attraction of the job opportunities and public services in the cities. It was also facilitated by the opening of roads and the expansion of communications by radio and TV, which spread the word about the existence of a better world and the possibility of moving there. Different from China or South Africa during apartheid, there were no legal limitations for the poor to move the cities. The usual pattern was for the immigrants to come alone to settle in irregular shantytowns and get a low-skill job, typically as a construction worker for men and as housemaids for women, and later to bring their families and relatives. For the immigrants who could get a job, life was better than in the rural areas, and the abundance of cheap labour was as boon for the expanding urban economies and upcoming middle classes. Others just drifted into indigence or petty criminality. None of the cities, however, were able to implement proper policies to deal with the demands and problems associated with urban overcrowding, including health care, schooling, public transportation, and growing insecurity. In the 1960s, the city of Rio de Janeiro decided to forcefully remove some favelas from central areas and move their population to housing settlements in the city's outskirts, but their living conditions deteriorated⁴. From then on, most policies in Rio and elsewhere consisted at most in efforts to improve the living conditions in the shantytowns, without interfering in their daily routines. Left to their own, without public services and policing, most settlements came under the control of criminal gangs, acting at first in relatively harmless illegal activities such as gambling, but, since the 1970s (when the main waves of migration had already receded) turning violent with the introduction of drug trafficking, bringing urban criminality to extreme levels. In recent years, the state government in Rio de Janeiro decided to interrupt the informal acceptance of gang control of the favelas through their occupation by "pacification police units", a process that is still going on (Carneiro 2012, Pamuk and Cavallieri 1998, Perlman 2010, Perlman 1979, Portes 1979, Riley, Fiori and Ramirez 2001, Zaluar 1993).

Inequality in Brazil is not just a question of which job one has or how much a person owns or earns, but is also related of where the person lives and his ethnic origin. For

⁴ This settlement became famous by the movie the 2002 "City of God", directed by by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund,

analytical purposes, Brazil is usually divided in five regions – North, scarcely populated, which comprises mostly the Amazon region; Northeast, the semi-arid region of the old sugar plantations, and the poorest; the Southeast, the more populated and industrialized region, which includes the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; the South, with the highest standard of living on average, and largely populated by descendants of European and Japanese immigrants; and the Centre West, the frontier region characterized by large plantations, the “Pantanal” swamp areas and also where the new capital of Brasilia is located. There is just one main language, Portuguese, and intense miscegenation among persons of different origins, but clear differences in income, occupation and education between descendants of black slaves, whites, natives and Japanese immigrants.

To account for these differences, the Brazilian statistical office and other agencies ask the persons to classify themselves according to their “colour or race” – white, black, brown, yellow, or indigenous as a separate category (Table 1 and Table 2). Correlations between “colour”, education, occupation, income and area of residence tend to be high, and studies on inequality in Brazil have always to deal with the relative weight of these different variables, or, in simpler terms, the relative weight of “class” or “race”, when controlled by other factors, on opportunities and outcomes. Carlos A. Costa Ribeiro provides a summary of this literature and the conclusion of his own analysis, based on data from Brazil’s 1996 national household survey, is that racial inequality only affects the chances of mobility for those in the upper classes, but not for those in the lower social strata (Ribeiro 2006). This helps to explain how race-based affirmative action in higher education became a salient issue of social policy in Brazil in recent years, but not for other levels of education.

Region			
	Persons	mean household income per capita	years of schooling (18 and older)
North	16,505,391	627.26	7.5
Northeast	53,693,689	598.97	6.8
Southeast	78,811,664	1120.68	8.6
South	27,488,439	1148.11	8.3
Center West	14,252,362	1155.46	8.4
Total	190,751,545	937.68	8.0

Source: National Household Survey (PNAD) 2013

Table 1

Colour or race			
	Persons	mean household income per capita	years of schooling (18 and older)
Indigenous	658,279	537.03	6.6
White	87,418,100	1,251.65	8.9
Black	15,225,072	689.60	7.1
Yellow	854,389	1,699.68	10.4
Brown	86,591,301	659.92	7.2
Total	190,747,141	937.71	8.0

Source: National Household Survey (PNAD) 2013

Table 2

In the economy, industrialization developed more strongly in the State of São Paulo, but the services sector expanded everywhere, as well as the public sector, employing growing numbers of persons, and a large portion of the old, labour-intensive agriculture was replaced by modern agribusiness. As one author describes it, “economic growth and industrialization in Brazil after 1945 were constant and rapid until the beginning of the 1980s. It was during the 1970s that the country definitively changed from a rural to an urban society in which industrial and service sector work far surpassed rural work. By 1980 Brazilian industrial output was the seventh largest in the Western world. Educational opportunities also increased rapidly after the 1950s, particularly since the 1970s; between 1970 and 1975, for example, tertiary enrolments more than doubled” (Scalon and Cano 2008). These changes may have been influenced by specific government policies at different points in time, but, mostly, they resulted from broad social and economic processes related to the ways the Brazilian economy and society linked to the international economy and was influenced by global trends, as well from the effects of expanding social services, such as education. In the 1980s, the economy slowed down, internal migration was reduced, and the issues of economic and social inequality, which have increased during the years of economic expansion under a military regime, became more salient. Brazil went through a new a period of significant economic growth and expanding social policies since economic stabilization in 1995, which however proved to be difficult to maintain after the commodities boom spurred by China slowed down.

For the population, the movement from country to towns, the opening of new jobs and the expansion of education have been described in the literature as an intense process of social mobility, both between generations, with children getting better jobs and more education than their parents, and also within generations, with persons changing and improving their living conditions during their working life. The authors who studied this mobility also noted that most of it took place at the bottom of the social pyramid, with peasants becoming low-paid urban workers, while income inequality increased, since most of the new wealth was kept in the hands of a small elite (Lima and Campos 2015, Pastore 1982). There was some improvement in income inequality between 2002 and 2011, with the Gini Index going down from 0.59 to 0.53, still very

high for international standards, and no changes since then. Absolute poverty⁵, however, went down significantly: “about 5.6 million people in Brazil moved out of poverty between 1977 and 2001, a decline of 23.6 per cent. Most of the poverty reduction occurred between 1993 and 2001, when some 4.2 million people (. . .) escaped poverty” (Bonelli, Gonzaga and Veiga 2008).

Authors writing on social change distinguish between “structural mobility”, having to do with broad changes in the social structure and the economy, and “fluidity”, the likelihood of persons to move up or down the social ladder, which they also describe as “equality of opportunity”. Summarizing a large body of research on social mobility and equality of opportunities in Brazil since the 1970, Ribeiro writes, “a huge decrease in inequality of opportunity (measured by the differences of social class of parents and children) took place in the 1973-1982 period, as well as large flows of mobility from urban to rural classes. No other country besides Korea had such a large rural – urban mobility as Brazil in the 1970s. Inequality of opportunities also decreased, although it remained higher in Brazil than in other countries. This period of growth was followed by two decades of economic stagnation. From 1982 until the late 1990s the Brazilian economy barely increased and income inequality remained very high. Inequality of opportunity, however, continued to decrease” (Ribeiro 2012 p. 645 , my translation). Part of this decrease was related to the expansion of the labour market, due mostly to the increasing participation of women in the labour force, the expansion of formal education, which picked up speed in the 1980s, and the end of hyperinflation after 1994.

Another way of looking at inequality of opportunity was proposed by the economist John E. Roemer, by distinguishing “circumstance” variables, which lie beyond the control of the individual, from “effect” variables, which can be changed by individual behaviour, such as getting more education or migrating. An empirical study based on 1996 data in Brazil found that a group of four observed circumstance variables (parental schooling, father’s occupation, race and region of birth) account for more than a fifth of the total earnings inequality within gender/cohort groups in Brazil, and also constrains the persons’ ability to change their conditions by their own effort. According to the authors, “our analysis suggests that family background is the most important set of circumstances determining a person’s opportunities. Fifty-five to 75

⁵ “Absolute poverty” is defined as the income that is under the minimum necessary to buy the required calories for daily intake. Brazil does not have an official poverty line, and different authors estimate poverty and extreme poverty in different ways.

per cent of the total effect of circumstances can be attributed to parental schooling alone, and this figure rises to 70 to 80 per cent when the father's occupation is added" (Bourguignon, Ferreira and Menendez 2007, Roemer 1998).

A significant aspect of the process of economic growth and mobility was the growing access to different kinds of public services and consumption goods, including treated water, schools, electricity and public transportation. Until the 1990s, the telephone system in Brazil was a state monopoly, and it was almost impossible for a middle class family to get a landline. The sector started to expand with privatization in 1995, and a few years later cell phones were introduced and soon became accessible. Around 2000, 30% of the households had a cell phone; in 2013, 90% did. Access to computers and the Internet also expanded, reaching 50% of the households by 2013⁶. In the earlier years, there was a concern that the introduction of ICT would create a new "digital divide" between those who could or could not have access and learn how to use these resources (Sorj and Unesco Brasil. 2003); now, the number of registered cell phones in the country, 210 million, is the same size as the population, and the divide is mostly between generations. There are no systematic studies on the impact of ICT on the expansion of opportunities, but some effects are easily observable. In the informal labour market, it became much easier for providers to advertise their services and link directly with their costumers, or through digital companies specialized in work intermediation. Access to public and private services such as banking and social benefits became also simpler and more efficient, reducing the costs and possible corruption and inefficiency of intermediaries.

Internet-based sharing services, such as Uber and Airbnb, are creating new working opportunities for the provision of public transportation and hosting to many who did not have access to the regulated traditional taxi and hotel sectors, because of front-up costs and the need for flexibility. At the same time, they might be reducing the business and generating unemployment in these established sectors, and the net effects of these disruptive technologies are a matter of dispute.

Another recent development was the introduction of ICT technologies in education. There is a National Program for Education Technology (PROINFO) that aims to provide schools with equipment, educational content and access to Internet to schools, and several states and municipalities have also been buying equipment for their schools.

⁶ Data from the National Household Surveys (PNAD), different years.

An overview of several assessments of these projects up to 2011 concluded that “there was little evidence of effective use of technology in schools, especially in pedagogical applications for teaching and learning, which is a concern, given the amount of public resources that has already been allocated” (Martins and de Fátima Flores 2015). The situation may be different today, when each student already has his own smartphone or tablet, international educational materials such those of the Khan Academy are being translated and made available for free, and a myriad of small private companies and publishers begin to develop new technologies for school and student use. The expectation is that these technologies may give to the students the opportunity to bypass the limitations and rigidities of the traditional schools; but the consensus among specialists is that these technologies can only have an impact when the teacher is well-qualified, motivated and can engage with their students in the use of these new resources.

The perception of opportunities

This long experience of social mobility, in spite of high inequality and periods of stagnation, may explain why Brazilians tend to be very optimistic about their future, while distrusting the country's institutions. A survey carried on in 2007 in seven Latin American countries found that the population in all of them shared high levels of distrust on governments, congress, political parties, mayors, courts and the police. But, when asked about their economic conditions, they held high expectations for their children, irrespective of their current situation, even if they did not improve very much compared to their parents. When asked about the reasons for inequality, most respondents point to individual and personal explanations (lack of initiative, vice), rather than to social factors such as inheritance or social discrimination, which can be interpreted as an acceptance of social inequality, a finding which is consistent with other surveys (Scalon and de Oliveira 2012). This, however, is not incompatible with the generalized belief found in a previous study that it is up to the state, rather to the individuals themselves, to deal with the issues of poverty and inequality (Scalon and Cano 2008).

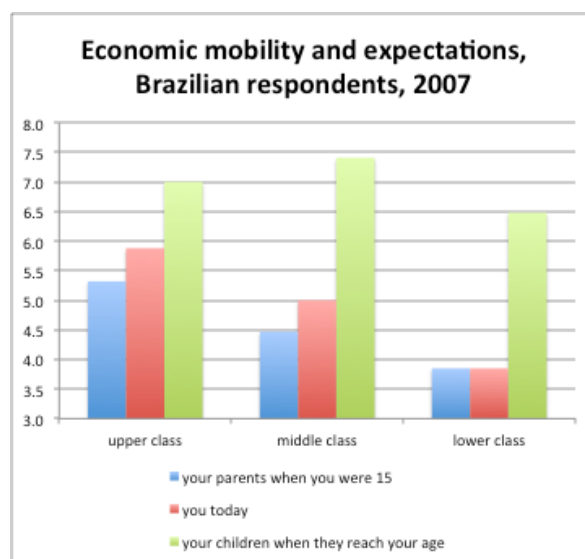


Figure 3. Self-placement in a 10-point scale of economic conditions. Source: (Schwartzman 2007b, Valenzuela 2007)

Conditional cash transfers

Traditionally, Brazilian governments and intellectuals, irrespective of ideology, did not deal directly with the issues of poverty, assuming that they would eventually disappear as the country developed and modernized. The rudiments of a welfare state started to emerge in the 1930s, but only for those holding regular employment in the cities, a small minority of the population. Eventually, the welfare system expanded to rural workers, but is still strongly regressive, with most of the resources going to middle and upper social sectors (Oliveira and Beltrão 2001). In the 1990s several local governments, and later the Federal government, started with different programmes of cash transfers to specific sectors in need, which were later unified in “Bolsa Família”, the conditional cash transfer programme that has been the flagship social policy of the Brazilian federal government since 2003.

The amount transferred to the families is small, depending on their level of poverty and number of children. Every family earning less than R\$70 per capita a month is eligible to collect the benefit, plus every family that has at least one child and earns less than R\$140 per capita. In 2013, approximately 13 million families benefitted from the programme, corresponding to about 52 million people, or 27.5 per cent of the country’s population. In spite of its large size, the programme costs only about 0.5 per cent of the country’s GDP, compared with 11.2 per cent spent on social security, 8.8 per cent on public health and about six per cent in public education.

Estimations are that Bolsa Família was responsible for about a quarter of the reduction on income inequality in Brazil since its inception. Since the amounts being transferred are small, its effect in reducing poverty is also small, but the benefits for those in extreme poverty conditions are significant: “while *Bolsa Família* reduces the percentage of poor people in the population by only 1.6 percentage points, it reduces the poverty gap by 18 per cent and the severity of poverty by almost a quarter. In spite of the improvement of welfare among those who remain poor, greater impacts on the percentage in poverty require higher benefits” (Soares 2012, p. 22).

However, Bolsa Família, as well as other conditional cash transfer programmes that were created in many developing countries, often with the support of the World Bank, was not conceived as just a mechanism of income distribution, but a means to move people out of poverty, through the development of human capital, an exit door. A recent review of the World Bank still defines Conditional Cash Transfers – CCTs - as “programmes that transfer cash, generally to poor households, on the condition that those households make prespecified investments in the human capital of their children. Health and nutrition conditions generally require periodic check-ups, growth monitoring, and vaccinations for children less than 5 years of age; perinatal care for mothers and attendance by mothers at periodic health information talks. Education conditions usually include school enrolment, attendance on 80–85 per cent of school days, and occasionally some measure of performance. Most CCT programmes transfer the money to the mother of the household or to the student in some circumstances”(Fiszbein and Schady 2009:1).

The evidence, however, is that the impacts on education and health care and other human capital improvements have been very small or non-existent, with some variations among countries (Cardoso and Souza 2004, Medici 2011a, Reimers, Silva and Trevino 2006, Souza 2011). The Brazilian government has spent significant effort in monitoring the conditionalities of the programme, particularly regarding school attendance, but only a small fraction of those found in non-compliance had their benefits cancelled. Summarizing his review, Soares writes that “in spite of the government’s attitude towards monitoring conditionality becoming clearly harsher over time, only 4.5 per cent of families that at one time or another failed to comply with their side of the bargain lost their benefit for this reason. This is a little over 4 per cent of all families that left the programme to date. However, for those of us who see Bolsa Família as social protection, this is unjustifiably draconian, since it is likely that these 4

per cent are precisely the 4 per cent that most need more support from the State". He concludes by stating that "Bolsa Família is really not an opportunity generation programme such as *Chile Solidario*: it does not kick out its beneficiaries, and its articulation to things such as job training or microcredit is relatively weak. It is not a human capital accumulation programme such as *Oportunidades/Progres*a: it does not necessarily support beneficiaries for the time needed for a generation of children to complete school, and the conditionalities are still less than draconian. It is not a full-blooded social protection programme such as Uruguay's *reformed Asignación Familiar* (the inheritor of *Plan de Asistencia Nacional a la Emergencia Social* – PANES) or the original Suplicy Basic Income Programme: it is not an entitlement and has only weak links to the remainder of the social protection system in Brazil ". (Soares 2012 pp. 10 and 30, Suplicy 1988).

The experiences of other countries mentioned by Soares show that it is possible to improve somewhat the human capital component of the conditional cash transfer programmes, but, even in the best circumstances, they are not substitutes for specific policies in education, health care and job creation. The World Bank review gives more credit to the benefits of the conditionalities, but also recognizes its limitations: "CCTs have increased the likelihood that households will take their children for preventive health check-ups, but that has not always led to better child nutritional status; school enrolment rates have increased substantially among programme beneficiaries, but there is little evidence of improvements in learning outcomes. These findings suggest that to maximize their potential effects on the accumulation of human capital, CCTs should be combined with other programmes to improve the quality of the supply of health and education services, and should provide other supporting services. They also suggest the need to experiment with conditions that focus on outcomes rather than on the use of services alone."(Fiszbein and Schady 2009:3).

Another conclusion is that it might be better to keep and improve the cash transfer programmes in their role of well-focused protection nets for those in extreme need, and to improve the institutions and programmes that deal directly with the creation and expansion of opportunities to the poor.

Education: human capital or entitlements?

The conditional cash transfer programmes are based on the assumption, derived from the human capital theory, that, as people get more education, they become more

productive, increasing their market value and becoming less dependent on public protection and subsidies to survive. The correlation between education and wealth is clearly established, both for individuals within societies and when we compare countries, but, at the same time, it is clear that education credentials can also bring benefits that are not correlated with productivity, but with the social status that is associated with them. These two views of education – as human capital (Becker 1964) and as social status (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Collins 1979) – are often presented as opposite interpretations, but can also be seen as complementary phenomena that coexist and may prevail or not in different circumstances (Baker 2004, Bills 2004, Walters 2004).

Access to education in Brazil has expanded dramatically in the last decades, after centuries of neglect, and the income differentials associated with education levels are very high, which gives credence to the belief that education is indeed associated with building up human capital. However, the quality of education has been consistently low, and productivity has not improved much in aggregate terms, which gives credence to the opposite view, that the credentials and status of the educated have been more important than its content in terms of human capital.

Figures 4 to 7 show how access to education expanded since 1992 for different categories – regional, ethnic and sex. For regional differences, we took the Northeast region, which is the country's poorer; for ethnicity, we combined the census categories of "black" and brown" (mixed blood), which are also the poorer and least educated.

The expansion started with the 1988 Constitution, which established that the country's municipalities should be the main providers of preschool and primary education, the state governments of secondary education, and the federal government of higher education; and that 25% of the revenues of states and municipalities, and 18% of the revenues of the federal government, should go to education. In 1998, part of the education resources of each state and their municipalities were allocated to a Fund, the National Fund for Fundamental Education (FUNDEF), to be redistributed back to the state government and municipalities according to the number of students in fundamental education (7-14). In 2007 the fund was expanded to include all from preschool to secondary education, changing the name to FUNDEB. The legislation also established the minimum that should be spent per student and for teacher pay, and the states that the Federal government should complement the resources for states that did not have enough resources to reach the minimum.

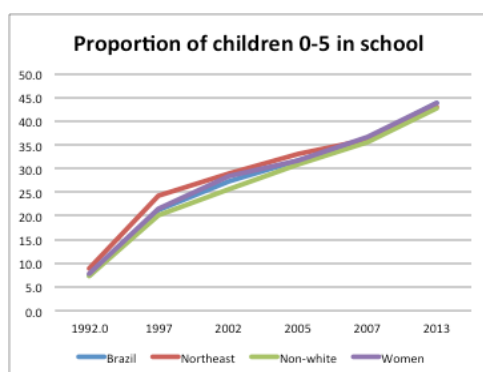


Figure 4

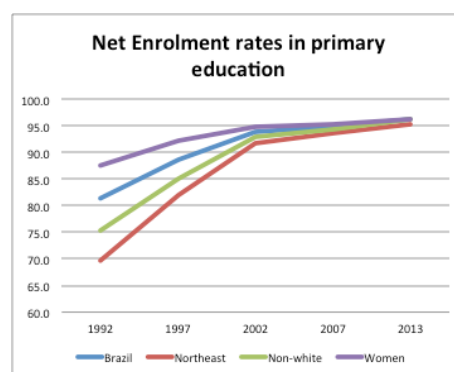


Figure 5

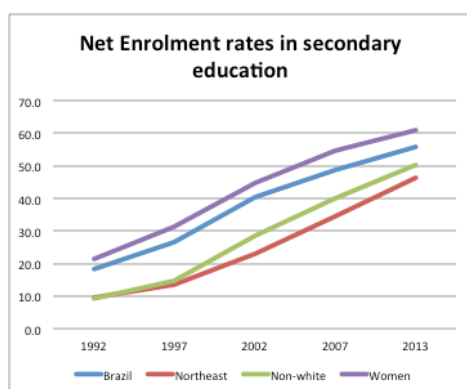


Figure 6

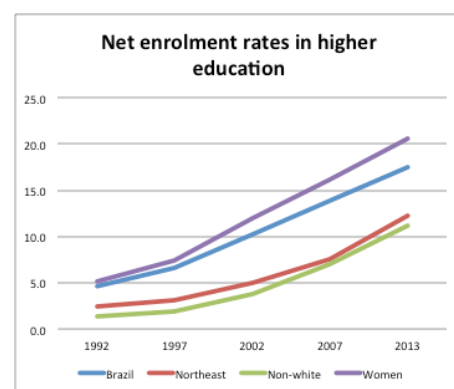


Figure 7

The consequence of this legislation was that local governments became very interested in opening new schools, enrolling more students and hiring teachers and school principals. It also led to strong demand on additional resources for education at all levels. Between 2000 and 2013, the expenditures per student in the country more than doubled, going from 2 to more than 5 thousand reais a year, and the percentage of GDP going to education went from 4.6 to 6.2%.⁷ For primary education, the gaps in access that existed among different regions and social groups in 1992 had practically disappeared since 2002. The gaps remained, however, for secondary and still more for higher education. By 2015, 76% of the 25 years olds of the white population had completed secondary education, but only 55% of the non-whites did.

⁷ Data from the National Institute of Education Statistics (INEP), Ministry of Education, <http://portal.inep.gov.br/indicadores-financeiros-educacionais> , accessed on June 20, 2015. This total includes also higher education.

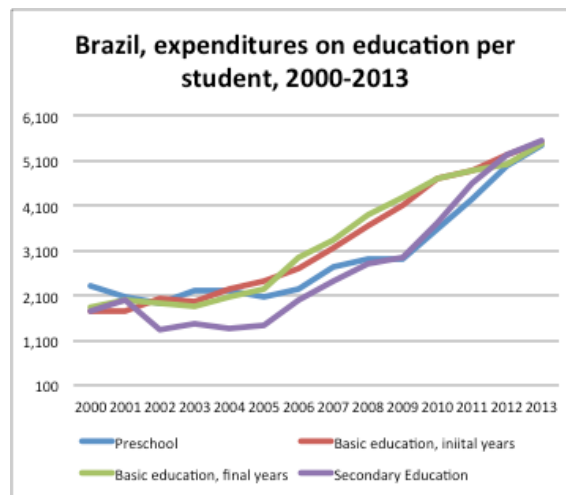


Figure 8

There was also a clear perception in the population that higher levels of formal education helped to increase their chances of finding a stable job and increasing their income; the largest bonus came to those completing higher education. This was true for all segments of society, but clearly more so for white men in the Southern regions than for blacks, women and those living in the Northeast.

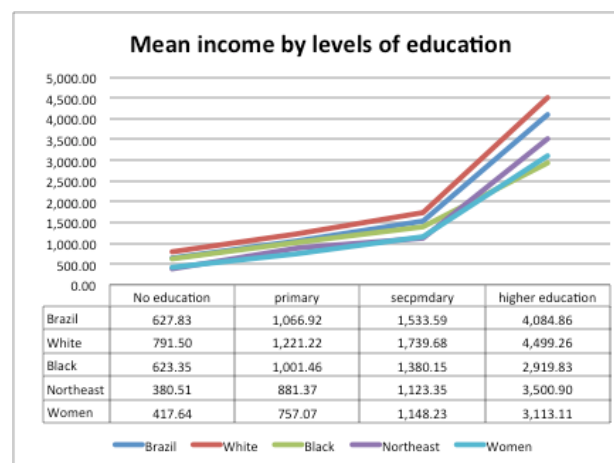


Figure 9

The expansion of preschool enrolment jumped significantly between 1992 and 1997 and has been rising steadily since then, without much difference among groups and regions. In fact, the data show higher enrolment rates in the Northeast than in richer regions. In recent years, the findings of James Heckman and others (Araujo et al. 2011, Duncan and Magnuson 2013, Heckman 2007) about the importance of early childhood education for lifelong achievements have been widely disseminated in Brazil, strengthening the demand of several vocal groups for expanding infant and preschool

facilities. This expansion, however, seems to be more associated with the needs of mothers to work and to have a place to leave the children during the day, than to a concern with the emotional and intellectual development of their children, which may be better off if they stay with their mother in the first years. Data from Brazil confirm that, to some extent, attending preschool leads to better outcomes later in life, but it depends very much on the their quality, which is usually not adequate (Barros et al. 2011, Campos, Füllgraf and Wiggers 2006, Curi and Menezes-Filho 2009, Ruzek et al. 2014).

In the 1990s the Ministry of Education created an assessment system for basic education, SAEB (Basic Education Assessment System - Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica)⁸, modelled after the American National Assessment of Education Progress, and Brazil also joined the OECD PISA assessments (OECD 2014). In 2007 the government introduced a new instrument for assessing each school, the National Index of Basic Education (IDEB), combining information of tests of language and mathematics with statistics of retention (they were part of a broader set of assessments implemented since the 1990s that helped understand better the conditions of education in the country, without, however, becoming very useful as instruments for change (Schwartzman 2013)). These assessments showed that, while access to school was growing for all sectors of society, the quality of education did not improve significantly, with important achievement gaps remaining between students of different socioeconomic status and “colour” or race, affecting particularly those classified as “black”, which are less likely than “whites” or “brown” to benefit from improvements in the school environment and the quality of teachers (Soares and Alves 2003). In the 2012 round of PISA assessments, Brazilian students came out well below average in mathematics (ranks between 57 and 60), reading (ranks between 54 and 56) and science (ranks between 57 and 60) among the 65 countries and economies that participated in the assessment (OECD 2013).

There are many initiatives from the Federal, state and municipal authorities to try to improve the quality of education. The Site of the Ministry of Education in the Internet lists about 20 different programmes, from school meals to teacher education and school buses⁹. In 2014 the Brazilian Congress approved an ambitious National Education Plan for the next ten years, which resulted from a large process of

⁸ In Brazil, “basic education” includes preschool (3-5), fundamental (or primary) education (6-14), and secondary education (15-17).

⁹ http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&id=12492&Itemid=811

consultation with all the interest groups related to public education. It has 20 goals, one of which is to raise public expenditures to 10% of GDP; another is to place 25% of the students in full-time schools; a third is to improve the scores of the schools in the education development index – IDEB – according to pre-established targets. The national, state and municipal governments are required by law to meet the plan's targets, but there are no clear links between the goals and instruments and means to reach them, particularly in view of the country's economic downturn. More broadly, with all the emphasis placed on access, quality never became a cause of concern for governments and the population as a whole.

Vocational education: the exit door?

Most of the expansion of education in the last 20 twenty years followed the academic path, starting with language and arithmetic in the first years and gradually introducing social sciences, natural sciences and the humanities as isolated disciplines, in preparation for higher education. Vocational education was mostly done by training institutions managed by the business sector with public subsidies, which prepared workers according to the employers' needs, not granting regular school certificates. These institutions, known as the "S System", of which the best known is SENAI, the National System of Industrial Apprenticeship, have a good reputation, but their reach is limited (Castro 1979). In the past, the legislation used to allow different paths for secondary education – industrial, agricultural, commercial and teacher preparation (normal schools), in addition to scientific and classic academic tracks – but most students preferred the academic path, which promised access to the prestige and high income of the learned professions. The current legislation requires all students to complete the same academic path if they want to have a secondary school degree, to which they can add a vocational (technical) certificate taken at the same time or subsequently (Almeida, Amaral and Felicio 2014, Schwartzman 2014).

Higher education is strongly stratified, with 25% of the students in highly selective public institutions and the remaining in private, often for-profit teaching institutions, providing mostly degrees in the social professions in evening and distance courses. There is a unified entrance exam for public universities, the National Assessment of Secondary Education (ENEM). In 2014 there were 6.2 million applicants disputing about 200 thousand places in free, public institutions, and the chances of being admitted are strongly correlated with the student's socioeconomic background. To bypass the difficulties of the regular secondary education, older persons can go

through a speedy qualification process (the Education for Young and Adults track, EJA) or get the certificate if they reach a minimum score in ENEM, but the number of persons following this track is small.

Besides the difficulties of getting into the best institutions, the financial benefits of a higher education degree have been falling, particularly for the less prestigious and more accessible careers such as teaching, business administration and law. These two factors may explain why, in recent years, a growing number of older persons who completed secondary education have enrolled again in vocational programmes. Currently, of the about 10 million students in secondary school in Brazil, 1.7 million work for a vocational degree, most of them after completing the academic program.

In 2011 the government launched the National Technical Education and Employment Programme (PRONATEC), with significant resources, which became one of the main flagship education programmes of the federal government. As summarized by a World Bank review, “the programme plans to invest a total of R\$24 billion (i.e., approximately US\$ 10.8 billion) between 2011 and 2014 for a total of almost 8 million enrolments: 2.4 million in technical education and 5.6 million in FIC [initial] training courses. Under this programme, MEC [the Ministry of Education] has established partnerships with other Ministries (Social Development, Tourism, and Communication) to identify and select potential trainees for these courses. MEC finances the programmes but it is implemented by the municipalities (as in the case of *Bolsa Formação* and *Bolsa Trabalho*), by States (as in the case of *Brasil Profissionalizado*), through Sistema S or through the Federal network of VET institutions. PRONATEC also intends to expand the VET programmes and courses it finances to private sector provision.” (Almeida, Amaral and Felicio 2014:9).

Most of the programme consists on fellowships given to persons attending initial or technical (secondary level) vocational courses, provided by SENAI, SENAC and other institutions. One component of PRONATEC is its link with another federal programme called “Brasil sem Miséria” (Brazil without Misery), also established in 2011, aimed at assuring income, access to public services and productive employment for those in conditions of extreme poverty. The goal is to provide short, initial vocational courses in large numbers to persons older than 16 who are identified as extreme poor among the recipients of Bolsa Familia and others listed in the unified roster of social programmes managed by the Federal government. The courses last about 160 to 200 hours, and are arranged by municipalities, in partnership with the Federal government, which

transfer resources according to the number of students, oversee the activities through a centralized computerized system, and provide support. It is the task of the municipalities to identify the specialties with more demand in the region, to recruit the applicants and identify the providers.

There have been some attempts to assess the impact of PRONATEC on poverty, making use of the huge national unified roster of beneficiaries of social programmes (Cadastro Único), with about 86 million registers, and other databases, plus interviews and focus groups with participants. (Montagner and Muller 2015). In June 2014, 2,490 thousand persons had enrolled in PRONATEC, of which 1,146 thousand were part of the special “Brazil without Misery” programme (PRONATEC/BSM) (p. 136). Of those, 41% were in the Northeastern region, a significant proportion (37.8%) had up to 29 years and the majority (58.8%) completed secondary education. The vast majority (73%) of the participants were women and more than half (53.7%) were beneficiaries of Bolsa Familia. The average family income per capita R\$ was 318.24, a month, slightly below half the minimum wage in 2013 (R\$ 339.00), which corresponds to the upper segment of the recipients of Bolsa Familia (p. 99). A focus group research identified three main types of participants: young persons, mostly women, children of the beneficiaries of bolsa familia that were completing secondary education and wanted a professional qualification; older men, heads of families with working experience but low skills and unstable jobs; and older and poorer women, often heads of household, without previous working experience. There is information about how many completed or not their courses – most did – and the areas in which they were trained, but not much regarding the extent to which they benefited from the courses, for the lack of information about those in the informal labour market. With these limitations, the authors of the assessment conclude, cautiously, that participation in PRONATEC increases the chances of the participants to get into the formal labour market or to get established as individual entrepreneur. But, given the profile of those entering the programme – mostly young people, already with or completing secondary education – it is difficult to isolate the effects of the programme from other factors such as the expansion of secondary education and of working opportunities, and it is clear that the programme is not targeting those in direst conditions.

Access to the job market, social protection and services

The job market in Brazil is highly regulated. All employees are entitled to receive at least the minimum wage, an additional salary at Christmas, one month of paid vacation

and 8% of the salary that goes to a severance pay insurance (FGTS). There are additional payments for overtime, and for when the employee is dismissed. In addition, 20% of the salary goes to pay social security, plus different taxes. Thus, a nominal salary of 1,000 a month means direct costs of 1,540 for the employer. Salaries, beyond the minimum wage, are often set by collective bargaining by sector between unions and employers' associations, and apply equally to large and small firms. In return, the employee is entitled to several benefits such as retirement, sick leave, unemployment insurance and severance pay. For small business, the costs of paying for all this plus the administrative difficulties of compliance may be too much, and many prefer to stay out of the formal job market if they can. Many workers, particularly with low skills, have difficulty finding a regular employment with all these costs and benefits. So, there is a large informal sector of the economy, around 45% of the working force, which includes both low skill workers and skilled individuals who chose to work independently.

Economists often argue in favour of making the labour contracts and conditions more flexible, to reduce its costs and allow more persons to be hired, but the unions have always succeeded in barring it. In spite of this, informality, which used to affect 60% of the labour force in 1963, have been steadily coming down since 2001, and was 45% in 2013. Most of this decline seems to have been associated with economic growth, the modernization of the economy and the increase in the number of persons with education credentials in the labour market (Tafner 2006).

As the economy started to slow down, the government introduced new legislation to stimulate formal employment. Starting in 2008, new legislation was introduced to allow companies in labour-intensive sectors (such as textile, garment, shoes, food, electrical materials, and others) to pay for social security 1 or 2 per cent of their gross sales instead of 20% of the salaries. The expectation was that this would stimulate the companies to hire more. There is no evidence that it actually increased formal employment, but it did let to a significant loss of revenue for the social security system, and in 2015 the government asked the Congress to revert this policy. In 2012, the government introduced legislation to allow individuals to get established as micro-entrepreneurs through a simplified procedure and paying a small monthly fee to get access to social security; about 5 million people had registered as micro-entrepreneurs by 2015. There are other policy instruments to stimulate job creation, such as microcredit, manpower intermediation, the "first employment" programme for the young, and support of cooperatives. It is possible to get information about the rules

regulating these instruments and the amounts committed or spent, but not about what they have actually achieved in terms of expanding opportunities.

Social welfare, including retirement, pensions and health care, started in Brazil in the 1930s, with separate institutes for workers in specific sectors of the urban economy (industry, commerce, financial services), and later developed into a unified federal system (Malloy 1979, Melo 2014). Retirement benefits are related to one's salary and years of work, up to three minimum wages. Rural workers and low-income persons are entitled to a minimum pension of one minimum wage at age 65 for men and 60 for women.

There is a unified national system of health care that is free, but in practice it is difficult to use, with long cues and shortage of doctors and equipment, and those who can afford pay for private health insurance. Preventive medicine, in terms of family care and mass inoculations, has been improving, and Brazil has one of the world's best support system of HIV/AIDS patients (Medici 2011b). The Health Family Programme (Programa de Saúde Familiar), combined with the mobilization of non-medical Community Health Agents, is an effort to provide primary health care to the population that is considered very successful, although with limitations. In 2006, there were 26,100 family health teams, working with more than 200 thousand health community agents, providing primary, covering most of the country's territory, with emphasis in rural areas and smaller urban regions. There are many studies showing that the programme had important impacts in reducing mortality for various age groups and in reducing fertility, when comparing covered and uncovered populations, and on prenatal coverage. The main limitations of the programme are that it does not reach properly the country's larger urban population, the lack of properly trained family doctors, particularly in poor and remote areas, and the limitations of the public health care centres and hospitals to provide support for those in need of more complex medical attention (Medici 2011b, Ministério da Saúde 2012, Oliveira and Borges 2008, Sousa and Hamann 2009).

Inclusion, social movements and empowerment¹⁰

As we look at social change and the implementation of social policies, one question is whether these changes take place because of the demands of the beneficiaries, or

¹⁰ This section is mostly taken from Simon Schwartzman and Maína Celidonio Campos, **Democratic institutions, governability, and social equity in Brazil**.

whether they are implemented by governments according to their own vision of what was good for different groups in society.

Following the victory of the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) in the presidential election of 2002, the inclusion of social movements and organizations in policy formulation and implementation increased significantly, together with the creation of a large number of citizens' councils in different sectors such as health, education, child protection and the environment, as well as in economic policymaking. Some agencies, such as the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI), the National Secretary for Affirmative Action (SAPPIR), and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, are usually staffed with members of related social movements. The National Union of Students, an independent organization, works closely with and is supported by the government through different types of grants and subsidies. In some cases this arrangement has led to conflicts within the government, as happened, for instance, in the Ministry of Environment, which opposed the construction of hydroelectric dams in the Amazon basin (Fearnside 2003); in the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, which supported land invasions by militants of the Landless Workers Movement (Romig 2006); and in FUNAI, on issues of the demarcation of territories for indigenous populations (Fisher 1994).

As part of the same trend, several municipalities experimented with participatory budgeting (Baierle 2009). The notion that direct democracy should replace the traditional forms of representative government became popular, and has been reinforced by the spread of internet-based social networks. The actual impact of this trend on the improvement of social inclusion and reduction of poverty and inequality is unclear, and subject to intense ideological controversy. There is a growing literature that suggests that the original expectations were probably too high (Cohen and Fung 2004, Cornwall 2007, Frey 2003, Wampler and Avritzer 2004). A 2001 study by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development on grassroots movements in Chile and Brazil showed that, as these organisations became dependent on the government or international funding for their survival, they tended to be co-opted and to decline in ability to represent their original constituencies: “the grassroots organisations may simply deliver social services for the state (health and educational reform in Chile), or be split and demobilized by bureaucratic infighting (health reform in Brazil). In all cases a closer involvement with state agencies has left the organisations exposed to clientelist controls and political bossism. Grassroots

organisations across Latin America cannot survive now without state funding. But the price is often a loss of their capacity to maintain a critical stance or promote alternative development projects. With or without the state, they are increasingly preoccupied with their own financial survival, often to the detriment of the constituencies they are meant to serve. Many organisations disappear, and grassroots leaders leave to work elsewhere” (Foweraker 2001).

Conclusions

This overview, and the wealth of research done on these issues in the last several years (Bacha and Schwartzman 2011), shows clearly that the policies were not as effective as they could have been in social work, poverty reduction, education, health care, social security, urban violence, housing and others. To understand why this was so, it is necessary to take into account the decision-making and political context in which these policies were implemented. For politicians, both in the Executive and in Congress, the policies need to be simple, easy to understand, do not confront established interests, and help to win elections; however, to be effective, the policies would have to be complex, and often to go against vested interests. Most of the social policies in the last decades have been indeed very simple in their formulation, limited to the distribution of benefits in response to real or perceived demands, with poor implementation and little or no assessment of outcomes.

To deal with the complexities of implementation and assessment would require a competent civil service, staffed with well-qualified personnel, who could understand the difficulties involved and implement long-range policies protected from the vagaries of political mandates and elections. The public service in Brazil has some areas that approach these criteria, such as treasury and foreign affairs, but most of it does not. Admission to public service is supposed to be based on strict meritocratic criteria, but the federal government has about 40 thousand places that can be filled in by “trusted” appointees, which may be party militants, representatives of social movements and of specific vested interests, or just relatives or business partners of politicians. Currently, there are 32 ministries and cabinet-level agencies, filled in largely through negotiations with political parties in exchange of support in Congress, and corruption and graft have been standard currencies of political bargaining for a long time. Given this situation, it is surprising that some complex policies are implemented at all. When they do, it is because the civil service is not just filled in by political appointees, but there are also

technical competent professionals, whether in professional careers or appointees, that are committed to carry on with their work as best as they can.

The distribution of benefits and entitlements by the government to specific social groups is strongly ingrained in Brazilian political practices from its beginnings, stemming from the way the state was organized as a patrimonial enterprise for the benefit of the Portuguese colonizers, in the past, and of the local elites since independence in the early 19th century (Faoro 1979, Schwartzman 1977, Schwartzman 2007a). As the country became more industrialized since the 1930s, these old practices turned into a kind of state capitalism that kept expanding, creating an oversized and mostly inefficient public sector including banks, transportation, communication, energy and utilities companies; cozy relationships between governments, political parties and large contractors; a subsidized system of semi-public labor unions and business associations; and myriad of subsidized credit, tax exemptions, tariff protections and other benefits provided to private companies by public banks, including the National Development Bank (BNDES), and national and state governments. In the 1990s, under the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, several large state-owned companies were privatized, and a new law of fiscal responsibility limited the expenditures and indebtedness of national and local governments, as part of an effort to stabilize the country's economy after years of hyperinflation.

In spite of these efforts to reduce the size of the state and make the economy more competitive, most of these institutions and practices remained intact, and were reinvigorated when the Laborer's Party period began in 2002. The social policies implemented during the Lula and Rousseff periods were not a departure of these old practices, but their extension to other sectors of society, including the poor in the countryside and urban peripheries and the cooptation of social movements and popular organizations through money transfers and public jobs. The main concern was always the provision of short-term benefits in exchange of political support. In education, for instance, the priority was to give more money to schools and to try to appease the teachers' unions, without trying to make the schools more efficient and accountable for their results. In higher education, the government expanded the subsidies to public universities, without requiring them to show that they were improving their quality, and passed legislation requiring them to reserve 50% of their places to poor and black students, without making sure that these students were

actually learning, as they should. The minimum wage legislation, requiring regular increases in real terms unrelated to productivity, may have helped to reduce income inequality in the years of economic growth, but may be aggravating the growth of unemployment created by economic recession.

This overview is centred mostly on policies implemented in the last 15 or 20 years, but in 2015 Brazil is a different country. A recent paper by some of the country's leading economists points out that the federal government responded to the 2008 financial crisis with the expansion of credit for consumption, subsidized loans and other benefits to selected sectors in the economy and the expansion of public expenditures, with the expectation that this would lead to economic growth and generate resources to keep expanding the public sector. The consequence was a growing public deficit and the slowdown of economic activity, with stagnation in 2014 and recession in 2015. (Almeida Jr et al. 2015). With the inauguration of the second mandate of Dilma Rousseff in early 2015, the country entered in a profound economic depression, of which it is not expected to come out in the next few years. Much before that, public expenditures had been growing above revenues, creating a structural problem the government did not confront, since it would require cutting benefits for different sectors of society and facing opposition.

It is still too early to know the impact of this economic downturn on the myriad of social programmes established by the federal government in the last several years. There are already indications that some indicators, such as the reduction of inequality and poverty, are not improving any longer, and unemployment is growing fast. The current government, which was re-elected with the promise to keep and expand the economic and social policies of the past, is still arguing that the crisis is just a glitch in an otherwise long-term successful policy of inclusion and growth, which will soon restart. But the economic crisis is compounded by a profound political crisis and a massive corruption scandal, unveiled by an autonomous and professional sector of the judiciary and Federal Police, and these are likely to be the last years of the political cycle started with the election of president Lula da Silva in 2002.

Looking back at the experiences of the last two decades, what would a policy approach that was strictly focused on expanding opportunities for those who are poor, disadvantaged or excluded from participating in modern society look like in the context of Brazil, and how would it differ from the approaches pursued in Brazil so far?

Our overview shows that most of the reduction of poverty and expansion of opportunities of the last decades came out from economic growth and the modernization of society and the economy, and less from specific policies. This confirms that the main instrument for expanding opportunities is to create the conditions for the economy to prosper, unencumbered by an intrusive, overextended and mostly inefficient public bureaucracy. This does not mean, however, that the public sector has no role to play, and that social policies are irrelevant, since pure market mechanisms are not likely to provide safety nets to millions still in poverty, improve the quality of education, provide affordable health care and deal with the growing problems of overcrowding and violence in the large urban areas. The main difference between the usual practices and a new, hypothetical approach centred on expanding opportunities would be to implement these programs not as mechanisms to distribute benefits, but as a means to endow the population with the competencies and instruments they need to take charge of their own lives, instead of relying on entitlements and public handouts; to make sure, through regular assessments, that the policies are getting the expected results; and to recognize that the resources are limited, and should, therefore, be focused on those in extreme need. This new approach should also get society and the private sector more involved in the formulation and implementation of these policies, as well as in sharing its costs, without transferring the government's public responsibility for the public good to the stakeholders' vested interests.

This, however, is easier said than done. The 2015 crisis may be an opportunity for the country to give up these old practices and eliminate the subsidies to special, and create a more stable, transparent and equitable playing field for the business sector to thrive. It would be also an opportunity to make the public sector, leaner and more efficient in its multiple roles of regulating the economy, improving the country's infrastructure and providing essential public services. Bolsa Familia proved to be a significant safety net for those in extreme poverty, and, given its low cost and positive results, it is not likely to suffer, but its contribution to reduce poverty and, particularly, to enhance human capital, was limited. Economic adjustment will probably affect the benefits enjoyed by middle sectors, including the retirement and pension systems. In education, many programmes based on subsidies and devoid of careful assessments of impact, such as PRONATEC, higher education student loans and fellowships abroad, are already being cut, and will need to be deeply revised. Expenditures on public education

are not likely to continue to growth, but the existing resources could be used more effectively to provide better education. The whole health care system will need to be revised, increasing its focus on primary care and support for those in need, with cost sharing and partnerships with private providers for the middle and upper sectors. Ultimately, the expansion of opportunities for the poor will depend on making them less dependent on public transfers and entitlements, and more productive and better educated.

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